

EVOLUTION OF A DEPARTMENT AS A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS*

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Abstract

The 2002/2003 Seton Hall University (SHU) ELMP (Education Leadership, Management and Policy) Department objectives included developing a “learning community” or Community of Learners (COL) framework for ELMP to advance a research and scholarship culture and have a “researchable” element. The Department developed a framework and concept paper to get started. Secondly, such a plan should be useful to meet NCATE Standard 5 to document faculty qualifications, performance and development. The ELMP working draft drew heavily from Boyer (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* to expand traditional ideas of “scholarship” and blend them into the COL. ELMP faculty reviewed and revised the paper and incorporated the COL in the ELMP Strategic Plan (8/05). This paper explains the evolution of the COL, including the rationale, definitions and outcomes from the pilot usage. Initial indications are that ELMP faculty, students, and others are working collaboratively in the COL, which is the basis of expanded scholarship efforts.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

Introductory Comments

The 2002/2003 Seton Hall University (SHU) ELMP (Education Leadership, Management, and Policy) Department objectives included faculty interest in developing a “learning community” or Community of Learners (COL) framework for ELMP that, among other things, would expand the idea of “scholarship” and advance a research and scholarship culture. Because one major goal of higher education should be scholarship and research to advance knowledge, the ELMP department developed a framework and concept

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paper. Secondly, such a plan should be useful to meet NCATE Standard 5. The working paper was reviewed by ELMP faculty (4/04) at the ELMP 8/04 Annual Retreat, revised and incorporated into the ELMP Strategic Plan with objectives, processes (etc.) and activated in early 2005. This chapter explains the evolution of ideas for ELMP discussion on the learning community idea, including a rationale.

To get started, the planners enlisted assistance from a SHU EdD student, Charles Lyons, Jr. who was interested in a parallel idea for dissertation research and who suggested that we draw on his on-going library review of the “Professional Learning Community” or PLC idea [Lyons, 2003, August 18: “Professional Learning Community (PLC): A Developmental Model”]. The ELMP working document also drew heavily from Boyer (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* to expand traditional ideas of “scholarship” and blend them with elements of PLC (a generic term found in the literature). A PLC generally embodies concepts of a “learning-centered community or of a Community of Learners” or COL. The designation “COL” was selected as a starting point for ELMP pilot and developmental efforts.

Into the Abyss: Attempting to Make Sense of the COL

The ideas of “research culture,” “culture of scholarly inquiry,” Professional Learning Community (PLC) and COL may each have slightly nuanced meanings, but as a starting point, consider that ELMP’s COL effort is the concept conveyed by the collectivity of the terms, with emphasis on research and scholarship. The COL has special importance in education, particularly in institutions of higher education (IHEs), relative to the traditional and evolving mission of IHEs. The following is from Boyer’s (1990) discussion of higher education, its history, purpose, and scholarship.

In 1869 the image of the scholar as teacher was evoked by Charles W. Eliot who...declared that “the prime business of American professors...must be regular and assiduous class teaching” (p.4).

To the idea of teaching, the Morrill Act (1862) and Hatch Act (1887) advanced the task of service as a mission for IHEs. Once again, according to Boyer, Eliot of Harvard spoke: “At bottom most of the American institutions of higher education are filled with the modern democratic spirit of serviceableness. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community” (Boyer, p.5).

Boyer made the case for the university’s role in basic research both inside and outside the halls and walls of academe (pp. 6-13). The reciprocal ideas of basic and action research were “energized” by the faculty and student “determined efforts to apply knowledge to practical problems” (p.7).

[R]esearch and graduate education increasingly formed the model for the modern university. Academics...were moving inevitably from faith in authority to reliance on scientific rationality...this view of scholarship called for a new kind of university, one based on the conviction that knowledge was most attainable through research and experimentation (p. 9).

The dichotomy here is apparent: ... “while young faculty were hired as teachers, they were evaluated primarily as researchers (Boyer, p. 11. *Emphasis in original*). Publish or perish. Yet, the mission of service and the idea of research as “ivory tower,” along with the move from “elite” to “mass” in the IHE mission (note the impact of the GI Bill of Rights) left things incomplete. Research generated on campus and taught to students needed to be applied and used properly. Inquiry required application to social improvement. Thus, from Boyer (2002, p. 16) “...the work of the professoriate might be thought of as having four separate, yet overlapping, functions. They are the scholarship of discovery; the scholarship of integration; the scholarship of application; and the scholarship of teaching.” (*Emphasis in original*). Education administration (EdAd) requires all four types of scholarship!

The ideas that Boyer (1990) expressed formed a basis for considerable similar discussion (e.g., Achilles, 1994) of issues related to EdAd’s knowledge base: To the degree that EdAd is a profession, not just a discipline, the tasks of EdAd professors and of the education field must include “Discovery” (research) and such things as “Integration” and “Application” (use, service), as well as “Teaching.” The basic logic for this position, which supports all four of Boyer’s “Scholarships,” appears in Achilles (1994, pp. 166-168) and also provides a rationale for the COL to include practitioners as well as professorial colleagues and present students. A fairly long quote, patched with minor editing from Achilles (1994, p. 167) encompasses the Boyer (1990) and COL ideas.

Interestingly, practitioners explain that they get their useful information while at work—that is, while they are on the job and not in university classrooms. “It is difficult to ignore the testimony of school

administrators that their training programs are far from adequate in preparing them to resolve the problems they face: (Pitner, 1988, p. 368). “Fewer than 2 percent of elementary school principals credit their success as school administrators to their graduate course work” (Pitner, p. 376). Pitner noted that among practitioner complaints of preparation programs is that “programs do not provide the opportunity for applying theoretical knowledge to actual situations (p. 378). Indeed, by 1988 there had been developed the Handbook of Research in Education Administration (Boyan, 1988), but there still was no corresponding Handbook of Practice in Education Administration, suggesting a valuing—at least by those who write in the field—of writing about theory and research rather than about practice. Perhaps professors of EdAd felt absolved by Pitner’s [other] finding: “The denigration of professional training by practitioners is by no means confined to the field of school administration” (p. 378).¹ Note that by 2006 there still is no Handbook of Practice in Education Administration. Maybe soon?

Most would agree that a knowledge base (KB) included content that those in a field consider part of and important to that field. C. Wright Mills once noted that at a minimum, to be a discipline a field must have a body of knowledge (content). A common language is important. To the extent, then, that EdAd has a discipline element, or that EdAd is its own “field,” EdAd’s method of inquiry is also part of the KB. Since education (and in particular EdAd) is not just a discipline...but is concerned with a beneficial application (the “Why?” question) of the “What?” and the “How?” of a discipline to solving human problems, then as a profession (EdAd) is in a position to extend the discipline’s content. At a minimum, a profession’s knowledge base adds to content and method of inquiry two elements: context and delivery. Content, by itself, may be of interest to the academician or researcher, but may be of little espoused value to a practitioner. (Emphasis in original).

Because a professional needs to know What to do (knowledge derived mostly from quantitative research), How to get the “what” done (knowledge derived from mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative methods) and Why, (or why not) do something (knowledge primarily from qualitative research), research in a profession needs to be “Qualitative/quantitative” (Q^2) to be thorough and useful to the field. But even Q^2 research will need explanation, demonstration, and dissemination (Teaching/Service) to be understood and correctly applied. This need is ample explanation for involving “the field” as part of the COL, thus incorporating all types of Boyer’s scholarship to accomplish the path from discovery to use in education improvement. Ideas here, although now connected to Boyer’s ideas, were derived from Whitehead’s (1929) insights. (Achilles, 1994, p. 167 Paraphrased).

Alfred North Whitehead (1929) developed several important conclusions about knowledge and the place of the university in knowledge development and transmission. Note that this work (1929) was long before the important recent work in cognitive psychology...Through philosophy and deduction Whitehead (1929) arrived at a conclusion that seems verified later by work in psychology and by induction.

In the history of education, the most striking phenomenon is that schools of learning...exhibit merely pedantry and routine. The reason is that they are overladden with inert ideas. Education with inert ideas is not only useless, it is, above all things, harmful...(p. 13).

To Whitehead, “Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge” (p. 16, emphasis added). Without knowledge about using knowledge, knowledge is not much use, or as Whitehead says, “Knowledge does not keep any better than fish” (p. 102). If EdAd is an applied field, it seems that Whitehead speaks directly to EdAd preparation issues.

If the “stuff” of EdAd preparation programs in IHEs is not particularly useful to those who would practice EdAd in schools, we might begin with the notion that EdAd preparation programs are, like many other traditional, university-based programs, composed mostly of inert ideas, and of ideas provided absent of application (e.g. context) by people who don’t practice or even demonstrate what they preach. Practitioners call these “ivory tower” ideas pronouncements by “eggheads”...

The ELMP concept of the COL at SHU blends and initiates many ideas expressed by others from different places and times, using logic, deduction, and expository language to bridge those ideas with the work of professors and practitioners. The needs to report to accrediting bodies and to address NCATE Standard 5 give the COL idea “legs” through its instrumental value to fulfill a task many professors find irritating—keeping records for reports.

The Task At Hand

Given this preamble and general ELMP agreement, faculty consideration of its COL embraces all four categories of Boyer's (1990) Scholarship Reconsidered. The ideas of a research culture/COL include (internally) faculty, students, administrators and involve (externally) clients or consumers of the enterprise who also have reciprocal roles. A COL includes the idea of community as expressed in Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC). Bateman (2002) provided a structure for both the idea of community and its attendant culture as intended in a "culture of scholarly inquiry" or COL that the ELMP Department seeks. (For Bateman's extended definition and discussion of PSOC and references for PSOC, see Glossary of Terms. Appendix A).

The work to this point has identified and included some key terms, trends, and ideas around concepts that, for sake of brevity, are combined into a "Community of Learners" or COL. The COL embraces ideas and meanings inherent in various, similar terms [culture of scholarly inquiry, research culture, PLC, high-performance learning community (Louis, 2003), collaboration (Grumet, 1989), etc.]: COL in no way restricts the concepts under consideration; it simply is a shorthand designation for the ELMP plan at Seton Hall University (SHU).

An Emerging Framework (Lyons, 2003) and Beyond

The strengths of ELMP's COL rest on Boyer's (1990) four types of scholarship, each equally valued; upon relationships as expressed in PSOC; upon the organization and structures in the specific context of ELMP (including ELMP itself); and upon the individual and collective abilities, distinctions, inclinations, talents (etc.) of COL members. Lyons' (2003) Appendix A provides a theoretical framework for elements that rest upon Boyer's four types of scholarship that are the professional action base, as well as the knowledge base for the COL.

In Carnegie Foundation work, Shulman (2003) discussed not only the teaching's role in developing professionals, but also the ideas of PSOC, and forming a specific identity (a way of acting, talking, etc.). In Shulman's (2003, p. 3) words:

One emerging theme in this work is that learning to be a professional isn't a purely intellectual endeavor. To become a professional, one must learn not only to think in certain ways but also to perform particular skills, and to practice or act in ways consistent with the norms, values, and conventions of the profession. Thus, to learn to be a lawyer, one needs to think like a lawyer, perform like a lawyer, and act like a lawyer.

Acting is more than knowing something or performing well; it seems to involve the development of a set of values, commitments, or internalized dispositions. It reminds me of what theological educators talk about as formation—the development of an identity that integrates one's capacities and dispositions to create a more generalized orientation to practice. Moreover, professionals cannot, in principle, learn all that they will need while they remain in school. Professional education must have at its core the concept of ongoing individual and collective learning, because the experiences of engaging, understanding, and acting must become the basis for subsequent learning and development (p. 3. Emphasis in original).

A community requires actors or players ("All the world is a stage..."). For the evolving COL at SHU, the principal "dramatis personae" are those broadly designated as ELMP faculty, students, former students and practitioners associated with SHU through the Study Council and Service efforts.

Next, to be operational, the COL needs a core of consensually validated actions valued by the players or ELMP role incumbents. The actions (things for the actors to do) could be conceptually within frameworks such as Boyer's four scholarships. Thus, resources (broadly defined) will need to be specified [contributions, incentives, desired acquisitions (funds, knowledge, etc.)] to support the COL. Standards for distribution of the resources and tasks to achieve COL goals will be discussed and determined, along with priorities related to ELMP goal for seeking resources and recognition (Transparency).

Specifics of points provided here will continue to be categorized ("taxonomized," in Shulman's words): The operations, distributions, resources, effort, rewards, time, responsibilities, (etc) will be allocated to support the types of topics included in the (working) COL "theoretic framework." These tasks become agenda items for ELMP meetings, action lines for the Strategic Plan and foci for data collection and evaluation (e.g., NCATE Standard 5).

Change and improvement in IHEs are often popularized by expressions like "moving a graveyard," "herding

cats,” or orchestrating prima donas. Recognizing that individual faculty interests and talents are driving forces for faculty research, teaching and other forms of scholarship, ELMP members sought at least one instrumental value for the COL so the COL would not just be another task or “add on.” The College of Education was involved in State, regional, and NCATE accreditation efforts. The COL seemed a reasonable way to (a) demonstrate compliance with and growth on NCATE Standard 5, (b) meet College and SHU reporting needs, and (c) substantiate progress in outreach (Service, as defined by Boyer’s Scholarships of Integration and Application).

Although they are topics of separate papers, two structures were developed within ELMP to provide COL direction and to organize the diverse activities required by four types of scholarship. An Institute for Education, Leadership, Research and Renewal (IELRR) and the New Jersey Superintendents School Study Council provide a base for research, service, projects, grants, student recruitment and placement, and are the “Big Umbrella” to accommodate the external actors in the SHU/College/ELMP COL configuration.

One Example: NCATE Standard 5 and COL Intersection

Elements in the COL relate directly to NCATE Standard 5: Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development. Selected ELMP annual outcomes of COL efforts are compiled into a report on progress made for each year. The entries designate the cooperative, collaborative, or collegial efforts and specify the “actors” in the events, as well as the outcomes.

Because COL “actors” will be acting on common pursuits, faculty compile examples of “community” efforts at different levels (e.g., ELMP, College, local, regional, national, international) within each of Boyer’s (1990) types of scholarship [Discovery (research), Integration, Application (service), and Teaching]. The COL efforts include “actors” such as faculty/faculty; faculty/student; faculty/colleague (often a former student). The “community” events can be internal (ELMP) or external as delivered through the IELRR and school study council.

Steps to be Done in sessions of the ELMP annual two-day retreat:

- Define remaining terms in Glossary to assure a degree of precision and specificity in COL discussions.
- Provide examples of COL efforts, such as faculty symposia/round tables, assistance in seeking funding, developing applications, and meaningful projects for sabbaticals, cooperative publishing and presentation opportunities, collaborative/team teaching (with critique),...
- Seek “Transparency” as necessary to ensure smooth ELMP operations and equitable resource distributions for scholarly pursuits.
- Establish and refine the reporting process and format to track growth and outcomes of COL efforts. They will be especially useful for the Dean’s Annual Report to the University and for NCATE Standard 5.
- To be determined. A work in progress.

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Appendix A. Glossary of Terms

The literature review, COL theoretic base, and discussions in ELMP contain various terms that require some degree of common meaning and use in the process of evolving a COL (“research culture” or “culture of scholarly inquiry” or PLC). For example, Grumet (1989) emphasized collaboration and community as a PLC bases. Although emphasizing high schools, Louis (2003) described a High Performance Learning Community (HPLC) and the organization and processes involved in creating one. These ideas seem to apply also to the IHE context. Some terms needing common definition in the COL – seeking effort are:

Collaboration: The honest sharing of ideas, work, and outcomes that help 2 or more people grow and improve. To the degree possible, each person contributes and takes in relation to ability and need.

Collegial/Collegiality: A sense or climate of cooperative, collaborative sharing that embodies a sense of pleasure in achieving common goals or purposes.

Community (see also PSOC): A group with common goals or ideals whose members cooperate, collaborate and are collegial in dealings of importance to the group.

Culture: In the anthropological sense, the elements, artifacts, stories, history/herstory, myths, etc. are the “tangibles” of the group’s work and accomplishments (e.g., successes with grants, publications, etc.

Inquiry (see also Research): Any reasonably structured intellectual pursuit, questioning, or seeking. Inquiry need not be as formal and structured as research, but it may be.

Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC). According to Bateman (2002, p. 64), “Seymour Sarason (1974) coined the term [PSOC] to describe the fundamental psychological need all humans have for being part of a community. He defined PSOC as:

The perception of similarity to others, as acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others with one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure (p. 157) [Sarason, S.B. (1974). *The PSOC: Prospects for a Community Psychology*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.]

Bateman (2002, p. 65) discussed the concept of PSOC with elements that seem to relate clearly to the overall sense of a “community of scholarly inquiry” or COL where inquiry and scholarship seem to be within the purview of Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered* and of Shulman’s (2003) *Making Differences*.

Sarason suggests that all humans are aware of the presence or absence of the PSOC. We luxuriate in its presence and despair in its absence. The PSOC can be thought of as comprising “I-sense” and “We-Sense”

dimensions (Newbrough and Chavis, 1986). Newbrough and Chavis argue that the I-Sense differentiates one from the collective group, while the We-sense considers one as a member of a collective group. These two senses are reciprocal: each requires the other, and together they comprise the sense of community. This unique approach differentiates PSOC from social support and provides a construct that takes into account the dynamic interdependence of individual and environment. [Newbrough, J. R. and Chavis, D. M. (1986) PSOC, I: Forward. *J. of Community Psychology*, 14, 3-5]

A set of conditions has to be in place before individuals can feel a PSOC. McMillan and Chavis (1986), building on Sarason's definition of PSOC and existing research and theory on group dynamics, generated a theoretical model of PSOC that has four elements. These elements are:

1. Membership – a feeling of belonging and acceptance, of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. Personal investment and boundaries are important elements of membership.
2. Influence – a sense of mattering, or making a difference to a group, and of the group mattering to its members. Influence is bidirectional.
3. Integration and fulfillment of needs – a feeling that the community will meet the needs of the individual and that the individual can meet the needs of the community.
4. Shared emotional connection – an emotional bond that gradually builds as members of a community share events that require investment of time, energy, and effort and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through the commitment to be together.

[McMillan, D. W. and Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of Community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 14, 6-23.

Research (See Inquiry): A structured, formal inquire effort using validated quantitative, qualitative, or “mixed” designs and processes to produce robust, replicable, believable (valid) outcomes worthy of using in advancing and improving education or other common group goals. The Scholarship of Discovery.

Scholarship/Scholarly: Achieving excellence in one or more of the four areas of scholarship as defined by Boyer: Discovery (Research), Integration, Application, (Service) and Teaching. See Boyer (1990) for details.

Service: Extending work of individual faculty into application of IHE outcomes to improve education and to assist others, often pro bono, within and external to the IHE.

Transparency: Actions are taken openly and the various rewards/resources and celebrations are open and shared within parameters agreed upon by the group.